REVIEWS OF BOOKS

A TEXT BOOK ON SURGERY: GENERAL, OPERATIVE AND MECHANICAL By JOHN A. WYETH, M.D., New York. D. Appleton & Co. 1887.

Professor Wyeth's book is an attractive book; in a single, not very bulky volume, the pith and marrow of modern surgery is given. The scope of the work is comprehensive; so extensive a field could be covered in a single volume, however, only by the use of great condensation and brevity of treatment. The skill with which this has been done is very noticeable, and yet it is impossible that in many instances matters that a reader would like to find treated of are omitted, or merely suggested. Thus, such subjects as Pyæmia Septicæmia and Scrofula, are not included among the subjects discussed. This has necessitated also in many instances positive statements, which the author no doubt would have qualified, at least to the extent of giving the views of others differing from his own, if the scheme of his work had been more elaborate. In the matter of the part which micro-organisms play in the production of various surgical diseases, or in the disturbances of wound-repair, is the criticism which has just been made particularly valid. The entire mass of research as to the relations of micro-organisms to suppuration is contained in the simple brief statement that pus corpuscles and the liquor puris from all acute abscesses contain certain micro-organisms known as micrococci and bacteria, and that their "chief significance is that they give to pus a septic power, or that pus which contains them injected or absorbed into the blood produces septic fever—a condition which does not follow the injection of pus which does not contain these elements."

Diffuse cellulitis and phlegmonous erysipelas are also dismissed without any reference to the doctrine, so widely accepted by many surgeons of the greatest authority, that they are the results of infection by septic organisms derived from sources external to the body. A diffuse abscess, he says, results from the property which pus possesses under certain conditions of dissolving all connective and embryouic tissue. It thus meets with no barrier to its progress, and general infiltration occurs. He mentions, it is true, that some observers have considered that a specific micrococcus was the cause of erysipelas, but

adds: "The fact that it has been wanting in some instances examined by careful investigators would seem to disprove this theory"—and with this he leaves the subject. The specific organism of gonorrhœa is dismissed in about the same way. The vast subject of tubercular infection, in its multiform phases, receives but scant recognition throughout the work. Thus, in treating of the causes of vertebral caries, the only hint that one can get that in any case there may be a relation between tuberculosis and the disease is to be found in the statement that "any disturbance of the normal process of nutrition in the tissues in general—as in the syphilitic, tubercular, gouty, or rheumatic dyscrasiæ—or the impairment of vitality resulting from any acute disease, predisposes to inflammatory changes in the bones, and especially in the cancellous tissue of the vertebræ."

Destructive arthritis is spoken of in almost the same terms. In the production of that form of ostitis which leads into arthritis, he believes that the prime cause is capillary rupture in the cancellous expansion near the articular surfaces. He gives no opinion nor suggestion as to the influences which in some cases convert this simple traumatism into a progressive destructive process, beyond the statement that children suffering from any dyscrasia which not only renders the capillary walls less strong, but lessens the reparative power of the tissues involved in the area of extravasation, are the ones in which such capillary ruptures are most frequent. To this he adds: "I am not inclined to accept the opinion which prevails to a considerable extent, especially with German surgeons, that tuberculosis is so frequently the cause of ostitis as is asserted. Tubercular ostitis is not rare, but non-tubercular ostitis is believed to be more frequent."

Other examples might be given, but these must suffice. They show that the author still occupies a very conservative position with regard to much that has characterized the teachings of the more progessive and enthusiastic of the modern school of antiseptic surgeons.

Antiseptic methods in the making and dressing of wounds are accepted, however, as now established as the best beyond argument, because they embody "the great principles of cleanliness and carefulness." No endorsement is given, it will be seen, to the elementary principles upon which these methods are founded, or their relations to the activity of morbific germs. The first chapter is devoted to Surgical Dressings, including in these the materials now most in vogue in the dressing of wounds according to the antiseptic practice of the day. It concludes with a description of the method of preparing sublimate gauze and borated absorbent cotton.

Beyond these two substances, as absorbents for wound-discharges, he says: "Nothing is really needed. Pads or bags of peat, sawdust, jute, wood-wool, etc., are practically useless."

There are certainly many who do not share in this opinion, for they have found in suitable pads containing sawdust, moss, or similar material, a dressing not only more easily procured and prepared, more cheap and generally available, but also more certainly absorbent than any kind of prepared cotton.

The subject of anæsthesia occupies a chapter by itself. The use of cocaine for local anæsthesia is fully described. For purposes of general anæsthesia, most positive preference is given to ether. All of the objections to ether, it is said, fade into insignificance when brought face to face with the fact that about seven lives are sacrificed by chloroform to one by ether. According to the author, chloroform is fast disappearing in practice. These statements might be questioned by some; there are remote dangers of respiratory disorders and kidney congestions fairly attributable to the use of ether, which in quite a proportion of cases determine delayed fatal results; these deaths, it is possible will be charged up to the account of ether by and by, and then possibly the disproportion between the accounts of the two agents will not be so great. At present the jury is divided on the question of ether vs. chloroform.

The chapters on Amputations, Aneurisms, and the Ligatures of Arteries are especially good. The illustrations are copious and clear. By the use of color, the vessels are made exceedingly distinct. It is believed that this is the first time in which this use of color in illustrations of this kind has been made in a surgical text-book.

It is impossible to take up in detail for examination each of the twenty-one chapters of this very interesting book. Its teachings are clear and positive. Its shortcomings, if they be judged such, are upon the side of conservatism. As a handbook for the use of students it is unexcelled; its convenient size—less than eight hundred pages of royal octavo, its clear print, its many and excellent illustrations, its practical character, will all combine to commend it to the use of many readers.

L. S. PILCHER.

TRANSACTIONS OF THE AMERICAN SURGICAL ASSOCIATION. Volume IV. Edited by J. EWING MEARS, M.D., Recorder of the Association. P. Blakiston, Son & Co., Philadelphia. 1886. 8vo. pp. 240.

This volume contains the papers read before the American Surgical